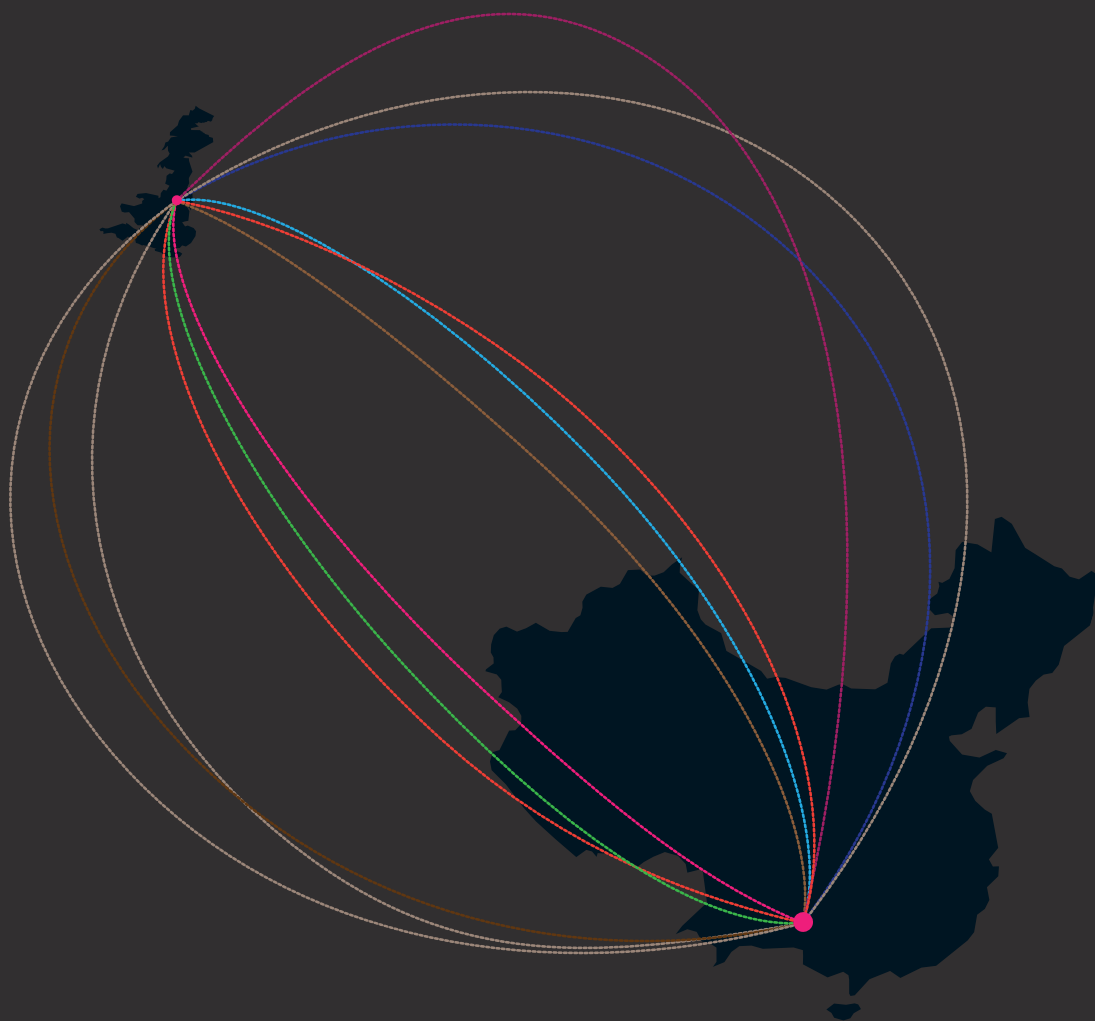


Being There

Reflections on 20 years of the
International course at the Huddersfield
Department of Architecture



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CONTENTS

- 4 _____ Acknowledgements
- 5 _____ *Introduction*
by Dr. Richard Fellows and Carl Meddings
- 15 _____ *Architectural Field Study in an Unfamiliar Culture*
– case study in China trips
by Dr. Yun Gao
- 25 _____ *Joint Architectural Projects with Students in Visiting Countries*
During Field Studies
by Dr. Yun Gao and Associate Professor Jing Gao
- 36 _____ *“Seeking Harmony not Sameness” Through International Co-Operation:*
Feelings of Huddersfield-KUST Joint Design Studio
by Professor Hui Zhai
- 38 _____ *The Regional and International Education Ideas and*
Practice on Architecture
by Associate Professor Liping Li

Student Works

- 48 _____ Smita Patel
- 50 _____ Peter Hinchliffe
- 52 _____ Nicholas Tansella
- 54 _____ Christopher Robinson
- 56 _____ Simon Lunn
- 58 _____ Daniel Morgan
- 60 _____ James Mooney
- 62 _____ Jamie Griffiths
- 64 _____ Julian McIntosh
- 66 _____ Michael Allen
- 68 _____ Nicolas Procter
- 70 _____ Simon Whittles
- 72 _____ Steven Dempsey
- 74 _____ Yolanda Ao-Chan

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Yun Gao
September 2010

INTRODUCTION

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The Huddersfield Department of Architecture had developed a degree course and was fully recognised by the RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) by the early 1980s. However, aside from the personal predilections of individual staff members, and a strongly held belief that all buildings should be responsive to their sites, there was no sense of a distinguishing philosophy underlying the course, which marked it out from many other ‘recognised’ courses whose curricula were, of course, related to RIBA requirements.

A catalyst to change came in the middle of the decade through the publication of the *Esher Report*, (1984) a response by the RIBA to the then Government’s distrust of the professions and worries about restrictive practices. Allen Cunningham notes that it was “to counter government-based manpower planning pressure.” (2005:415-441) Although it appeared to be successful in that architects retained their professional examinations for qualification and courses were not reduced in length, this was at the expense of some schools of architecture which were threatened with de-recognition, apparently to appease the Government. In order to counter this threat, a new course was developed in Huddersfield which took a radical approach.

At the time there was much discussion about how the general acceptance of the Modern Movement had led to an architecture which conformed to its own rules, but ignored the context in which it was set. This, together with the ubiquitous use of framed construction in steel and concrete, the development of building systems and standard components, removed any reference to ‘place’, except by the superficial copying of local styles. In addition the transport infrastructure based on roads which, even in urban areas, were responsive to the scale and speed of motor traffic, led many towns to become ‘anywhere and nowhere’. A scholarly response to this problem was provided by the development of the theory of ‘critical regionalism’, expounded most notably by Kenneth Frampton (1983). The theme was picked up and promulgated popularly in articles and features in influential magazines, such as *Architectural Review*. At a basic level, the movement aimed to provide places that belonged ‘somewhere’, and were rooted in a unique environment where local inhabitants felt that they belonged.

Huddersfield had a particular advantage from this point of view. Despite some modernisation – such as the introduction of the ring road in the 1960s – it was a town with a strong culture which was slow to change. The economy revolved around a high quality woollen textile industry which was mechanised in the 19th Century – and vigorous spin-offs from this in the growth of chemical and mechanical engineering industries. In physical terms, the town, on the edge of the Pennine hills, had a very distinctive topography to the south and the west with moorland, hills and valleys. Nearly all vernacular buildings, those of the 19th century and well into the 20th Century were built of the coarse grained sandstone – “millstone grit” – quarried in the

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surrounding countryside. The town grew out of its geological situation. The response of the architecture to the undulating terrain, the dry stone walls separating fields, and the great railway viaducts spanning the valleys, lead to a very distinctive visual environment. Consequently, the Department of Architecture was lucky enough to be located in an area with a real 'sense of place'. In addition, the beginnings of the trend for sustainability also lead to the re-use of heavy stone buildings, such as mills, which were 'long life, loose fit, low energy'.

The issues of urban alienation were also a problem worldwide. One aspect of the Modern Movement had been the emergence of the so-called 'International style', interpreted as though European Modernism could be transplanted anywhere in the world. In reality this meant that high-rise office and apartment blocks – often with glazed cladding – were beginning to be built across the globe. Prestigious and expensive though these may be, most were inappropriate culturally and physically, and spoke of the dominance of multi-nationals and western life style.

The need for new buildings, sympathetic to their locations, was especially championed by the Aga Khan awards for architecture, whose values were promulgated through the journal 'Mimar' (published by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, 43 issues, 1981-1992). Appropriate work undertaken across the Islamic world, from the Middle East to South East Asia was discussed and illustrated.

The 'International' course at Huddersfield was developed with 'critical regionalism' and the values of the Aga Khan award in mind, with the need to provide an appropriate response to the physical, cultural and social conditions wherever development was required. This, of course, required intensive study and an understanding of the specific locality, its history and its social and cultural significance, as well as a consideration of constructional technique. In addition, in hot countries, an understanding of how environmental modification was traditionally effected was highly important.

The International course was developed by staff in the department with input from a number of specialists including, for instance, Michael Brammah, principal of a consultancy in urban design which was, through the EEC, experienced in reporting on urban development across the world.

Simultaneously, Peter Clements, the principal lecturer in architecture had been appointed via the Northern Consortium of the UK (an association of various universities in the north of England) to lead the development of a new architecture programme at Institute Technology Mara, based in Shah-Alam in Malaysia. His experience there, starting from the basis of a traditional RIBA course, and developing it to become appropriate to its social and cultural setting, was helpful in providing a background to course development. At that time, too, architects such as Ken Yeang were working to produce a modern Malaysian

The 'International' course at Huddersfield was developed with 'critical regionalism' and the values of the Aga Khan award in mind

architecture. Peter's experience was invaluable, and when he returned to the UK in 1990, rejoined the course which was then in its second year.

The course was validated by the educational authorities and recognised by the RIBA. At first, students were recruited from many places, but as it gained strength, it also became mainstream for UK students. It was decided that subjects for the main field study, leading to the major third year comprehensive design project would be located within an unfamiliar environmental and social context.

The first overseas expedition for the new course took place in the academic year 1991-1992, when the first cohort of students reached the third year, by which time Dr Adenrele Awotona had been recruited as course director. Dr Awotona (now a senior member of staff at the University of Massachusetts, USA), was from Nigeria and had gained his PhD at Cambridge University. He organised the first study, taking with him two other members of staff for a six week visit centred on Calcutta (Kolkata) in India, where he had academic contacts. Immediately subsequent to this there were visits to Egypt, and then others in the Middle East, South East Asia and China.

In the years following, it was agreed that there would also be an 'overseas' component related to the Diploma Course (RIBA Part 2). In contrast to the BA, Diploma students travelled west, rather than east, and for the first few years, Dr Julia Dale lead study visits to Cuba, and then, subsequently to Ecuador and to Arizona in the USA.

The School's experience in the non-European area increased, and began to attract senior students from overseas to apply to undertake PhD studies related to topics connected to sustainable development, in particularly hot climates, and places with strong indigenous architectural traditions that were in danger from the imposition of western 'international' forms.

The Huddersfield International course has developed and prospered, and has given the School an identity which has attracted students at all levels.

◆
The visits:

Undergraduate field study chronology:

| | | |
|-------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1991 - 1992 | Calcutta, India | Dr Adenrele Awatona |
| 1992 - 1993 | Cairo, Egypt | Dr Adenrele Awatona |
| 1993 - 1994 | Cairo, Egypt | Dr Adenrele Awatona |
| 1994 - 1995 | Amman, Jordan | Dr Magda Sibley |
| 1995 - 1996 | Amman, Jordan | Dr Magda Sibley |
| 1996 - 1997 | Fez, Morocco | Dr Magda Sibley |
| 1997 - 1998 | Fez, Morocco | Dr Magda Sibley |
| 1998 - 1999 | Amman, Jordan | Susan Wood/Dr Magda Sibley |
| 1999 - 2000 | Fez, Morocco | Susan Wood/Dr Magda Sibley |
| 2000 - 2001 | Fez, Morocco | Susan Wood/Dr Magda Sibley |
| 2001 - 2002 | Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia | Susan Wood/Jon Bush |
| 2002 - 2003 | Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia | Susan Wood/Jon Bush |
| 2003 - 2004 | Shenyang, China | Susan Wood/Carl Meddings |
| 2004 - 2005 | Nagpur, India | Susan Wood/Jon Bush |
| 2005 - 2006 | Shenyang, China | Carl Meddings/David Brindley |
| 2006 - 2007 | Hoi An, Vietnam | David Brindley/Jon Bush |
| 2007 - 2008 | Kunming, China | Dr Yun Gao/David Brindley |
| 2008 - 2009 | Valetta, Malta | Vijay Taheem/Carl Meddings |
| 2009 - 2010 | Kunming, China | Vijay Taheem/Dr Yun Gao |
| 2008 - 2009 | Valetta, Malta | Vijay Taheem/Carl Meddings |
| 2009 - 2010 | Kunming, China | Vijay Taheem/ Dr Yun Gao |

The power of spending an extended period of time in a place; of falling asleep and waking up day after day in another culture cannot be replicated by academic means

The undergraduate programme is a unique opportunity for students to spend an extended period of time experiencing and engaging with an unfamiliar cultural context. Each trip has its own specific issues and characteristics in relation to general organisation and the emergence of local needs and opportunities for choice of projects and processes of interaction with local agencies and communities. The work undertaken by the students during the visit is essential preparation for design activity upon return to the UK. However, there are other less tangible, less measurable benefits that students gain from the whole experience of being there.

In the first instance, perhaps the most interesting challenge for students lies in the transition from a UK/western mindset to the point where they genuinely begin to get 'under the skin' of the place. This can manifest itself as fairly powerful and a clear 'culture shock', for example on arrival in downtown Calcutta in 1992, the overwhelming sense of being somewhere else, somewhere unfamiliar was apparent and deeply affecting from the very start. On the other hand, when visiting more touristic destinations, such as Fez in Morocco in 1997 and 1998 or Valetta in Malta in 2009, it can take a while for students to strip away the veneer of familiarity and begin to reveal the essence of the cultural and regional specificity.

In the 19 years since the first visit to India during the 1991 to 1992 academic session, destinations have been varied both in scale of settlement and extent of development, which has also lead to differences in the processes by which students begin to assimilate the nature of the place. For example, Jerash in Jordan visited in 1995, 1996 and 1999 (Fig.1) is an edge of desert, Arab settlement next to a deep valley and across from the well preserved ruins of a Roman town. The remote nature of the settlements, the searing heat, and the lack of Western influence make the awareness of cultural and climatic issues apparent and pressing from a student perspective, such that it becomes relatively straightforward for a critical and sensitive response to regional particularities to becomes manifest.

Fig.1 Jordan, 1994



In Kuala Lumpur in 2002 and 2003 (Fig.2) however, the issues of identity were more difficult to draw out. In a large, well developed (and still rapidly developing) city, the superficial similarities with the west (infrastructure, construction technologies, access to media and entertainment etc) mean that students need to begin to dig a little deeper to be able to respond to the cultural context so readily – although, the nature of Malaysian street life, food stalls and other local distractions, imbues the experience with inescapable cultural overtones. Coupled with the heat and humidity this meant that any architectural ideas had, inevitably, to be socially and climatically grounded.

The development of design skills and ideas runs in parallel and relies upon talking about the work; about ideas, possibilities, realities, atmospheres, materials, life and inhabitation



Fig.2 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 2002 and 2003

The power of spending an extended period of time in a place; of falling asleep and waking up day after day in another culture cannot be replicated by academic means. Students (and tutors) are not able to switch off from the experience. The senses are constantly bombarded with new and different sounds and smells, ‘unusual’ behaviour and unfamiliar, sometimes inscrutable, events. For example, one night in Shenyang in 2004 the city was unexpectedly alive with small processions and the lighting of tiny fires on street corners. The locals were celebrating an ancient (and subtly personal) festival in honour of their ancestors. On another occasion, in Hoi An in Vietnam in 2007, there was a full moon festival during the visit, where the town comes to life with lanterns. All electric light is banished and the streets and houses are lit by the flickering of a million candles.

The experience of the peculiarities of a place are not only apparent in the sacred or ritualistic, there are stresses and joys to be discovered in more commonplace events. In China in 2004, the group took a 27 hour train journey

from Shenyang to Shanghai, bedding down in triple bunk sleeper compartments and whiling away the time playing chequers, watching the agricultural and industrial scenery of The People's Republic slide by and scoffing whatever new delicacies were brought along by the refreshments trolley every half hour or so. The sense of the sheer vastness of the country and the seemingly complete human occupation of the landscape was remarkable (Fig.3). In Nagpur in 2005 the sheer density of life in the old town east of the railway, and in particular the chaos and confusion of the immense covered market made a powerful and lasting impression.



Fig.3
Shenyang, China, 2004

These experiences can be of a very personal nature. In Jordan in 1995 many students were invited back to the family homes of local students to eat and to be cordially welcomed to the country. The hospitality of the locals must be unrivalled. Students on the Diploma in Architecture course went to Cuba in 1998 where they were billeted with local families, able to experience first-hand the nature of dwelling in the country. Visits to China have often involved several banquets laid on by host institutions, where UK and Chinese students share a range of semi-familiar and, for our students, often completely unfamiliar food and drink.

It is normal practice when organising visits to make links with a local institution with a course in architecture. The local institutions are normally very keen to get the groups of students together and to arrange joint ventures, such as lectures, small design projects and visits to significant local destinations. The

connection with local students can be important in a number of other ways, not least the social aspects, which may include contact with families but will more probably include some form of advice and hands on help in sampling the night life. It was interesting in Shenyang in 2006 to be taken to an area of the city known as Korea Town to sample the particular restaurants and bars of the Korean community in China.

Not all of the visits have been undertaken in partnership with local universities. In Hoi An in 2007 and earlier in Fez in Morocco in 2001, for instance the visit was entirely independent of a local university and relied very much on staff and students making contact with local planning, heritage, building control and other agencies and community groups. The visits were very successful, primarily because both places enjoy World Heritage status and such agencies were readily available and very willing to assist.

What is really very apparent about the trips is the strengthening of the 'esprit de corps' amongst students and staff. The shared experiences are cohesive; from difficult and adventurous travel, such as the 'hairy' overnight coach from Hanoi to Hoi An in 2007, the sleeper trains in China in 2004 and 2006 or the mini bus excursions to outlying temples in Nagpur; to the 5am site visit to a busy park in Tiexi district of Shenyang (which included finding people engaged in tai chi, mah jong, vigorous physical exercise, sword fighting, line dancing, hairdressing and dentistry!) or the breathtaking arrival at the monolithic carved facade of the Treasury in the heart of Petra in Jordan; the shared experiences are endless sources of conversation and reflection.

And therein perhaps lays the true value of participation. Our methods for teaching and learning always involve conversation. The development of design skills and ideas runs in parallel and relies upon talking about the work; talking about ideas, possibilities, realities, atmospheres, materials, life and inhabitation. The common experience of an international visit creates an enormous shared wealth of reference for reflection, abstraction and proposition.

The conversations, of course, begin before the visit, but become deeply intense during the trip. Students and tutors are partners 24 hours a day. There are no 'normal' timetable rules here. Interesting conversations (over a meal or a drink) or often actual tuition (over the drawing board or computer) can carry on late into the night and can be ongoing for days. The experience is important during the visit, but has an ongoing legacy afterwards. The relationship between students and staff can shift fundamentally. The sense that tutors are sharing the discovery of a developing design can be enormously empowering.

The actual projects emerge from a discovery of the nature of the place. They are not predetermined. Tutors and students will share the exploration of the cultural, climatic, social and physical influences of the locations chosen for

The International field study visits at Huddersfield are no doubt 'landmark' moments in the education of our students

study. Projects are developed from a real understanding of the place. For example in Egypt in 1993 the group spent a day visiting the vast rubbish heaps that were then on the outskirts of Cairo that were part of a collection and recycling business run by the Druze Christians (who protected their assets with armoured patrols!). One of the most successful projects produced by a student that year was for a new refuse sorting facility. In Shenyang in 2006, in Tiexi district, the site was in an area of run down 1950s tenement blocks. The place was very poor and in desperate need of attention – but the community was very strong and very proud. Projects developed included an elderly persons' health centre, a community hall and a dance/tai chi centre.

One of the important aspects of such projects is that they are unlikely to be similar in content or scope to a 'similar' facility in the UK. The social interactions, traditions, family units, political structures, hierarchies and cultural relations are all specific and different. There are also issues of affordable or available technologies and how these may be utilised in the development of forms and spaces. In Egypt in 1993 for example, the group visited several projects inspired by Hassan Fathy including a 'brickworks' and a college for training apprentices to build traditional barrel vaults. The designs that students develop therefore are borne out of an investigation into appropriateness and sustainability (on many levels). Students begin to think about design from first principles, climatically, socially, spatially, materially etc.

In truth, the visits are fairly short (at around only four or five weeks) and may seem too short for students to pay sufficient regard to the full cultural and environmental context of their study locations. On the whole, however, the participants try very hard to 'get it right'. They are often engaged in an illuminating struggle to find a balance between their western-influenced architectural design thinking (particularly in terms of architectural language and construction technology) and a genuine desire to produce schemes that are environmentally and culturally responsive. The International field studies at degree level (RIBA part 1) help students think more about the concept of 'Critical Regionalism'. What is also noticeable, subsequently, is the influence on students' response to cultural context at final year of the Diploma in Architecture (RIBA part 2). This year (2009 – 2010) for example, many of the Diploma projects were based outside the UK and most of those students had participated in the field study visit to Vietnam in 2007.

There have been changes over the years in the way in which we engage with the field study visits, which in turn have led to some adjustments to the nature of the course. Primarily these are driven by changes in technology and the parallel phenomenon of a rapidly globalising economy. When the first visit took place to India in 1992 we did not have internet, email, mobile phones, laptops, GPS devices, Google Earth or advanced CAD packages etc. Of course, there are advantages and disadvantages. It certainly seems

more difficult now to shake off the cultural bubble that is inevitably brought by a travelling group when they first arrive. On the other hand the ability to maintain easy contact with local students and tutors whilst on the visit and afterwards can be enormously useful. Students and tutors are always keen to push new technologies to explore what's possible, such as the use of shared online workspaces (wikis) in Kunming this year.

The rapid development of cities often means that many downtown centres of the larger locations are not obviously regionally specific. Many could have been transposed to (or from) any other major Eastern (or Western) city. This is particularly interesting as the students' main concern can often be about the apparently wanton destruction of a city's built cultural heritage (as local populations seek to modernise and grow). The intentions of the course have never been to deny the understandable desire for change and improvement, but to seek ways to affect change appropriately and without importation of Western ideas. In some of the larger city locations this can be increasingly difficult to realise.

The emphasis has therefore shifted a little in recent years to be one that asks students to explore the narrative of place and to try to determine the durability of place and social interaction in the face of development and change. For example recent projects in Kunming in China have explored the power of contemplation in the urban oasis of a Chinese walled garden, whilst in Vietnam in 2007 projects sought to engage with traditional local industries and community or business resources within a town that is in danger of becoming pickled in the aspic of heritage and tourism. In both instances the forms of buildings developed were responsive to, but not copies of the existing built environment.

The International field study visits at Huddersfield are no doubt 'landmark' moments in the education of our students. The affects of such experiences are permanent and can be fundamental to the development of individuals. There is a real lasting legacy. In some cases this can be life changing. Our students go on to work in a wide range of familiar and unfamiliar contexts across the globe with a confidence and sensitivity developed during their time at the University of Huddersfield.

The International field study visits at Huddersfield are no doubt 'landmark' moments in the education of our students

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ARCHITECTURAL FIELD STUDY IN AN UNFAMILIAR CULTURE – CASE STUDY IN CHINA TRIPS

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Architectural field studies in unfamiliar cultures can address issues of globalisation in architectural education. The aim of the trip is to provide environments where students consciously design with cultural and environmental sensitivity in a variety of cultural and geographical locations. This requires design skills in an unfamiliar culture and communicative strategies to work with local communities, staff and students in local universities. To work in a different environment is a process of ‘defamiliarisation’. As suggested by Bauman, the term ‘defamiliarisation’ refers to a process which “takes us away from our comfortable, limited, commonly accepted and often unconsidered opinions about what everybody and everything is like and makes us more sensitive to the way that those opinions are formed and maintained. It alerts us to the ways that things which at first sight appear obvious and ‘natural’ are actually the result of social action, social power or social tradition” (1990:15-6).

*Staff and students in
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in an unfamiliar
environment*

A successful overseas study trip can be prepared and organised in terms of four distinct dimensions of cross-culture study. First, lectures, reading lists and choosing of various visiting places to reveal the complexity and richness of a different culture. Second, to foster cross-culture awareness and inter-cultural communicative strategies in a four step task. This task is for students to record expectations, experience and reflections of their learning processes before, during and after the trip. It can be done by using drawings, journals, reports and films etc. Third, to provide a professional environment by contacting the local universities so joint design projects can be organised with the local staff and students. Staff and students in local universities can make valuable contributions to find problems and solutions in an unfamiliar environment. Last but not least, to set up briefs of the proper projects that suit local situations. The process of design is the process of learning of the local culture and communication with local expertise and users. As in the real projects, brief building and design proposals are parallel activities. A properly developed brief should be an interaction between the description of the desired outcome and expectations. In the learning outcome, students need to demonstrate cross-cultural awareness and communicative competence.



International skills and those appropriate for the local requirements

It is a mis-assumption that students have an inbuilt potential to respond appropriately to an unfamiliar culture. To design in a different place requires skills that can be applied globally and skills in caring for the local needs. Tasks need to be set up for students to learn these skills. The ensuing inquiry of the solutions for problems is a global experiment, as Bernsen has noted that “the fact that the designs of nature and the designs of man can be analysed according to a common set of criteria, stems from the fact that they have a basic property in common: they are solutions to a problem” (Bernsen 1986:10, cited from Friedman 1997:5). A design in an unfamiliar culture requires the global experiment to be a reflective conversation with the local situations. If design and invent is a global skill, then a designer also needs to relate what he/she designs to the aspirations of the locals who use the buildings, and be able to predict the impact on the local users.

The most important part of architectural education in terms of curriculum focus and time spent by students is architectural design. It is normally in the design studio that students are expected to bring together knowledge from the different disciplines to inform the development of their architectural designs. But some skills are very difficult to learn merely in studio studies, such as cultural, sensitive and communication with people from different cultures. Field study and projects in different countries provide good opportunities for students to link the global design skills and local design skills and to link the knowledge they learnt in other modules such as those in history and theory in the design process.

One problem for students who study a practically orientated subject is that they are not willing to fully engage in the study of design history and theory. Some architectural students pay more attention to practically orientated skills, and prioritise their time between theory and practical work. This attitude can relate to surface approach and deeper approach of learning. For students who believe that design is about look and feel, they tend to focus on the styles and aesthetic effects of buildings. Students who take a deep approach to learning have a focus on understanding and making sense of the context a building sits in. They look beyond the literal aspects of material through interpretation and analysis. Whilst students who take a surface approach disregard underlying structures of the context, students who take a deep approach would seek out relational aspects both within the context and to the design conceptual frameworks.

The fact that the need to design in an unfamiliar culture encourages students to look for relationships that are embedded in the theory to make the design meaningful in an unfamiliar place. The assignments in a different place require the students to synthesise information and to have an understanding

It is normally in the studio that students are expected to bring together knowledge from the different disciplines to inform the development of their architectural designs

of the reasons for these events, in order to form proposals for the support of local culture. When students become confused about subjects they are supposed to know in an unfamiliar culture; and as they have tried to work their way out of their confusion, they have begun to look into the inner relationships between different aspects of the context. When students are able to appreciate fully the relevance and purpose of the theory and practice interface, they should then be in a stronger position to improve their international design skills and skills in caring for the local needs.

It needs a systematic approach to facilitate the learning for both international skills and skills in caring for the local requirements. From our experience of international trips to China, I will discuss our training programme for the overseas trips as follows:

Lectures, discussions and guided reading lists before the trip will help students to gain substantial knowledge of the place. A wide range of materials need to be chosen to avoid the essentialist views of the place in the lectures and reading documents.

Arrange a number of visits to cover different urban and rural areas in order to present the richness and variety of sub-cultures in each country.

Four step tasks for students to learn the communication strategies with each other and with local students of the visiting places.

◆ **Two trips to Kunming University**

Kunming is the capital city of the Yunnan province in Southwest China. The province is the sixth largest of China's provinces. It shares borders with Burma, Laos and Vietnam and has been known as the gateway from China to Southeast Asia. It is very well known for a very high level of ethnic diversity with 26 ethnic groups out of a total of 56 in China. The area was also one of China's less developed regions. Many rural families, especially in the peripheral areas, have considerably lower incomes compared to those in the developed regions. Kunming is the provincial capital of Yunnan. It is a city with a long history of more than 1200 years. The city is an important regional central city with a 4.7 million population. It is also called 'Spring City' due to the pleasant weather all year round. The city has changed dramatically since the 1980s following rapid urban development.

Staff and students in Department of Architecture of Kunming University of Science and Technology have worked with our architectural staff and students on more than 30 joint projects during field studies in 2008 and 2009. They have made valuable contributions helping our students to gain a greater awareness and understanding of cultural and contextual differences within the limited visiting time. Together with many lectures given by the Chinese staff and professionals and three days visiting the various sites and

museums in the city, joint projects provided Huddersfield students with the best opportunities to explore the Chinese architecture and culture. In the trip to China, our students also visited Lijiang, Daili, Xishuangbanna and Beijing. Each place presented them with different aspects of Chinese culture.



Lectures, discussions and guided reading lists to provide the background knowledge

Lectures, discussions and guided reading lists before the trip will help students to gain substantial knowledge of the place. The emphasis here should be to avoid the essentialist views of the place in the lectures and reading documents. A society would be complex enough to include various sub-cultures that are embedded in the built environment (Holliday *et. al.*, 2004).

In both trips to Kunming, students were overwhelmed by the large scale construction works carried out in the city and the international styles adopted on contemporary Chinese architecture. It was easy to draw conclusion that the city has been overtaken by modern or post-modern styles. But this is an over simplified way of introducing and studying places. The meaning of urban fabric are sufficiently complex to include the cultural attributes which people may consider Western or International style, but which are in fact normal for buildings and cities in Chinese society.

Lectures therefore were arranged both before and during the trip explaining that there are two tendencies in the modern Chinese urban development. On the one hand, international styles or some exotic modern styles in architecture are adopted to represent the modern lifestyle. Those are not designed for a context that consisted of the existing city urban fabric, but nevertheless are the results of the lifestyle that is different from traditional ones. On the other hand, strong sentiments are still tied to the Chinese traditions which lead to the design towards balance and harmony.

It would, therefore, be simpler to classify one building or the other as a traditional or a modern style. In Kunming, after the initial anxieties about the conflict of the tradition and modernity in the 1980s, the current tendency appears to avoid giving clear definition of tradition versus modernity. There is now increasing interest in the effects of hybrid juxtapositions in order to overcome the conflict between the two (Gao 2008). To design in this context needs to understand the reasons beneath the appearance in order to design for a livable urban area rather than focusing on the look and feel of the styles.

A contrast to what has happened in cities can also be clearly seen in rural areas such as Lijiang, Dali and Xishuangbanna where students visited during the same trip. In the rural area in Yunnan, tourism is encouraged by the local governments to promote the economy, that is one of the important reasons that many traditional houses are preserved and new buildings are

In both trips to Kunming, students were overwhelmed by the large scale construction works carried out in the city

designed following the traditional styles (ibid). However, the scarcity of timber would mean that it was more expensive for the farmers to build a traditional timber house than build a modern brick or concrete house. In less developed regions, cost of a building had a much bigger impact on the decisions of the house owners. Students need to understand the cultural and social meanings of the built environment in order to support and complement the local identities. Following each lecture, discussion was organised in groups focusing on how to keep the traditional ambience of the traditional areas, whether to preserve the existing structures or literally recreate something from the past.

Reading and theory have generally not been prized as much as design projects by architectural students, but critical thinking on design needs to be built on substantial knowledge of the local situations. It becomes even more important when design cannot rely on look and feel in an unfamiliar place, because what signs and symbols represented locally may well be very different from students' past experiences. To understand the local situations and to design for providing better built environment need careful study and critical analysis. Compare this to the projects in the familiar places, the work involved in overseas trips require more research, writing and professional dialogue on the culture aspects. This would be a good opportunity for the student to think about the theory and link the theory with the design practice in order to articulate the ways in which meaning is produced locally.

*critical thinking on
design needs to be built
on substantial
knowledge of the local
situations*

For these reasons, reading before the trip is still the most efficient way of building the relevant contents of a different culture. There is a necessity for a tutor to make the explicit reading list for all the students. The aim of such a list is to introduce the culture and history of culture in the visiting country from different perspectives. These documents should be a systematic review of the literature that includes a variety of different approaches, covering built environment in the urban and rural areas, various sub-cultures, technologies and materials etc. Each student can choose a particular subject from the list that he/she is most interested in to study in detail.

Trips to cover different urban and rural places to reflect various sub-cultures

Holliday et al have argued that subcultures are not hierarchically subordinate, or deviant, to the respective "parent" cultures. They note that "a more open-ended picture seems more appropriate, in which the "small cultures" of the tourists, the village, the tourist-tourism business and so on have a multiplicity of relationship both within and transcending larger entities." (Holliday et al 2004:28). Different places will reflect various subcultures in the country. We had chosen both urban and rural areas for students to investigate the social and cultural environments.

Apart from Kunming, the middle size city in China was chosen as the design site, rural areas such as Dali, Lijiang, and Xishuangbanna were also visited by students. These are places that not only rely on farming but also increasingly develop tourism to promote the local economy. A comparison was drawn to the visit to Beijing, the capital city with various famous architecture such as the Forbidden City, Olympic Stadium “Bird Nest”, and National Opera etc, which added another dimension to students understanding of the place. The comparison among these traditional settlements illustrates to the students the uneven developments of the various tradition within changing historical, economic and socio-political contexts.

In the joint projects, it was personal communications between British and Chinese students that helped to make the design decisions

◆
Four step tasks for students to learn the communication strategies and to look at a place through others eyes.

The overseas field trip can develop students’ communication strategies and principles in a globalising world. To study on the trip and to undertake joint projects with local staff and students will add an important learning element to the study trip. This is different from visiting tourists that focus on looking and consuming in another culture. In the joint projects, it was personal communications between British and Chinese students that helped to make the design decisions. The process can foster students’ ability in their future career to communicate with the clients and users of the building regarding their needs, and work with experts in other disciplines to make sure the building designed is buildable technically and financially. These communication skills which students learn will be useful when more and more architects are working on overseas projects.

To communicate with local communities or students in a different culture, the focus will be, as Holliday et al have argued that, “to avoid the trap of over-generalisation and reduction when describing and interacting with others. Within the theme of representation the emphasis will be on deconstructing the imposed images of people from the media and popular discourse.” (Holliday et al 2004:3). To communicate with anyone who belongs to a group with whom we are unfamiliar, we also have to understand the complex of how he/she is (ibid). Both British and Chinese students find everyone is very different in each group. They experienced how complex each person was, rather than the stereotype of how a Chinese or a Brit might be. People may also appear quite culturally different in each setting (ibid:13). As Gee has referred to ‘situated identities’, which means that we have ‘different identities or social positions we enact and recognise in different settings’ (Gee 1999:12-3).

According to Holliday et al, “to communicate with group members from different countries effectively they do not need information about the

other's presumed national culture. Actually it may lead to the views of prescriptive and indeed essentialist.” (2004:9) In the China trip, four step tasks were set up for students to learn to communicate with each other and look at a place through other peoples' eyes¹. These four steps are discussed in detail as follows:

◆ Stage 1: Translation

In this stage of the project each student teams up with an unfamiliar peer in the cohort to look at a place through others eyes. Each student in the team gives his/her peer a brief describing the setting of his/her own living room in the student house and his/her experience living in the city. The team member will then recreate the setting of the living room in order to catch this student's memory of the city. They can use notes, sketches, photos, models or films to show one person's memory of a place. Students can develop the recording of others' memory and sound out their own voices about the events in their own design. In the process, they aim to peel away the layers of the place and understand more about their group members and their views of the city. In this way they will also enrich their own understanding of the place (Fig.1).

Fig.1 BA third year student
Zillul Halim's collage for
Stage 1 in China trip 2009



¹ Thanks are due to Hillary Graham for helping me formalise the four step tasks for overseas trips.

◆ Stage 2: Imagination

In the first stage of the project students have experience to record people's memories, feelings and ideas about a place in their recreated images, films and models. In the second stage, students will use the same technique to record and analyse their own personal expectations for the China trip. They can describe the different culture they will meet, the challenges and exciting aspects they expect, and how they will be informed by, for example Chinese students they will work with, and about the city Kunming they will visit. Students are encouraged to use drawings and images rather than the purely literal to record the imagination. By imagining what the place will look like, students are encouraged to sound out their own voices to express their hopes and aspirations, fears and threats in the images and films.

Despite the advanced modern technologies that allow students to look at the cities in China online before they arrive there, they created many creative images of their expectations for what Chinese cities and Chinese culture would be (Fig.2).



Fig.2 Zillul Halim's drawings
for Stage 2 in China trip
2009

◆ Stage 3. Joint projects

Joint projects are carried out for both Chinese and British students to re-examine their expectations of places on site. These joint projects are discussed in detail in my paper *Joint Architectural Projects with Students in Visiting Countries During Field Studies* of this book. To overcome the language problem, we have at least one Chinese student who can speak good English within each group. In the process of setting up the right briefs for the joint projects, we have studied the different focuses in the architectural pedagogy in Kunming and those in Huddersfield.

In the joint projects, one should also note that there are potential different focuses on the architectural pedagogy in various countries. Professor Zhaihui, the Head of Department of Architecture and Associate Professor Li Liping have detailed discussion of their teaching practices in Kunming in papers *"Seeking Harmony not Sameness" Through International Co-Operation and The Regional and International Architectural Education and Practice in Kunming, China*

of this book. The architectural education in Kunming focuses on teaching students to look into the problems, to try to keep the local identity in the design. Their research has investigated detailed physical, social and economic surveys of the existing settlements and communities. Our students commented that their design schemes in the joint projects had paid more attention to these cultural and social context of the local users (Fig.3).

Fig.3 Sketches of analysing the space usage on Kunming streets by Smita Patel 2008



◆ Stage 4. Reflection.

When students come back from the trip, it is important for them to reflect upon what they experienced and learnt in China. To focus on the reflection of learning, students are asked to form a written and illustrated report that details their academic study in Kunming. Their report needs to focus upon key aspects of what they learnt while studying in a different culture and how this may influence their portfolio development. The report needs to address or be constructed around the following questions:

- 1) A brief summary of Chinese culture and whether this has influenced the portfolio development.
- 2) Using images and words to describe the different culture they experienced there, what were the challenges and exciting aspects they met.

3) Compare and contrast the learning experience while studying in China to their learning experience at home in the United Kingdom. What are the key differences and are there any similarities? Have they been able to develop their portfolio while in China that would not have been available to students while studying in the United Kingdom?

Our students commented that Chinese students had more detailed analysis related to cultural and social elements of the local communities and their design aimed to solve the practical problems. By knowing much more about different ways of solving the problems, students generally felt that the experience had made them think more about the cultural relationships, religion, family structure, and social aspects of the users in their design. This is just what study trips within different cultures aim to achieve.

In the process of setting up the right briefs for the joint projects, we have studied the different focuses in the architectural pedagogy in Kunming and those in Huddersfield

◆
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JOINT ARCHITECTURAL PROJECTS WITH STUDENTS IN VISITING COUNTRIES DURING FIELD STUDIES

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The increasing globalisation in the world has generated a market for more and more international students studying abroad and increasing number of university graduates working on overseas projects. For these reasons, universities have been developing international oriented curricula to foster skills that meet the requirements of diverse cultures. As part of the process, overseas field trips have become even more important in architecture curriculum. One strategy to enhance students' design and communication skills in diverse geographical and cultural locations is to work with the universities in the visiting countries on joint projects.

Very often students ask how they can learn about the local culture in order to be able to design properly in a different place. The question should be considered in two ways. On the one hand, lectures and reading lists need to be systematically formalised to provide knowledge of the local culture. More details of this aspect have been discussed in the other paper *Architectural Field Study in an Unfamiliar Place – case studies in China trips* of this book.

On the other hand, cultures and societies change in time and place, the design skills not only need to be sensible to the local culture and environment, but also need to engage critical thinking in order to analyse the new context, find the problems, and come up with proper design solutions. As Friedman has argued that “design education can no longer be based on exercises intended to teach students how to reproduce or improve selected objects. Instead, we must equip designers with the intellectual tools of the knowledge economy: analytical, logical and rhetorical tools; problem solving tools; the tools of science.” (Friedman 1997:58). In the joint projects, different from designing in the studio, the design process is a communication and discussion process. The process of learning about the local culture is the process of finding the solutions to problems. Find the right problems locally, create solutions and understand the impacts of the design on the local users are parallel activities. This paper will concentrate on this second aspect to discuss the organisation and arrangement of the joint projects by using two China trips as case studies.

At the University of Huddersfield, two trips of third year architectural students to Kunming, China in 2008 and 2009 were both organised with a number of joint projects to work with the staff and students in Kunming University of Science and Technology. Briefs for joint projects had been considered carefully before and during the trips to benefit both visiting and

local students. British students' fresh ideas based on their past experience and design skills formed a new perspective of thinking about the existing problems in Kunming, whereas Chinese students had the valuable knowledge of local life and also had their special design focuses. Students from both countries had to work together to share their own skills in order to seek out relational aspects both within the context and to the design conceptual frameworks.

◆ **First meeting**

Preparation is crucial to ensure the joint projects work well. The first meeting between the students from two universities can establish a common ground for conversation and communication to allow successful cooperation on design projects. To prepare for the first meeting, we had contacted the local university long before the trip, and arranged to have a similar design brief of an Art Centre for both British and Chinese students to work on. The site for the UK students was in York, a tourist city with a long history, whereas the Chinese students designed the Art Centre in a town close to Kunming city, where tourism has developed rapidly in the last five years because of the local ethnic culture. By designing an Art Centre with the similar space requirements yet situated in different cultural and social contexts, a comparative study could be done in group discussions. It sets up the opportunities for students to get to know each other by comparing the schemes they designed.

The group discussions were enriched by their knowing much more about different ways of finding and solving the problems

In this project, the requirement for a tourist area was the common ground for the site analysis, but a number of differences also existed between designs in these two places, not only because of the social and cultural diversity, but also because of separate design emphasis. Through presentations and discussions on the project in the meeting, it became clear that British students focussed more on the creative concept of design and model making, while Chinese students had more detailed analysis related to cultural and social aspects of the local communities and their design aimed to solve the practical problems. The group discussions were enriched by their knowing much more about different ways of finding and solving the problems.

◆ **Joint projects**

In the first three days in Kunming, it was arranged for students to visit different districts in the city, newly developed residential compounds and museums for culture and vernacular houses of 26 ethnic groups in Yunnan province. Six lectures by local lecturers, practitioners and planners explained the history of the city, planning development, urban problems, and introduction to the vernacular houses of 26 ethnic people in the province. All these events were attended by both British and Chinese students.

Before the trip, our students had expectations of what Chinese architecture would look like. By doing a 'four step' task, they gained experience of using images and notes to understand more of a place through others' eyes and to express their own expectations for the visit. More details of the four step task has been discussed in the other paper *Architectural Field Study in an Unfamiliar Place – case studies in China trips* of this book. Most popular images about China from students' expectations of the trip included the Great Wall, traditional courtyard houses, curved roof lines and the Olympic Stadium "Bird Nest" in Beijing. Modern communication technologies also allow students to look at online photos of the visiting place on Google Earth before arrival. However, it was not until on site that they experienced the 'cultural shock'. The 2D images they looked at before did not reduce the emotional impacts when they stood on the streets amongst the over-crowded pedestrians and traffic, and looked at the fast going construction works and large number of high rise buildings in the city.

Upon arrival in Kunming, students met face to face with all the problems brought by the fast development of the infrastructure and urban facilities: traffic problems, immigrants, large population, as discussed in the lectures, all emerged vividly into reality. To find and solve problems in the design projects, Chinese students' local knowledge became very valuable as the British students couldn't rely on their past 'known' facts to design for local users. On the other hand, British students' fresh ideas brought a new perspective to the ways of solving existing problems. The design process became the communication process for both visiting and local students to learn the local way of life, find problems and invent creative solutions. Not all the Chinese students were excellent in English, but by helping each other in the group and using drawings and dictionaries to communicate, the intensive interaction in groups was maintained throughout the process.

After looking into the current urban issues in the visits and lectures, a wide range of joint projects were set up to tackle the real urban problems, with each focussing on a special issue. The first two projects investigated how modern facilities could be used in the local context. One of the intensely discussed topics in the China trip is that the development of Kunming city had adopted the historic Old City as its centre. It was believed that this was more economical than building a new centre, consequently many of Kunming's conservation and traffic management problems stem from the choice of this site. Students were engaged in the group discussion of the issue and investigated the advantages and disadvantages of the choice.

In 2002, Kunming started the operation of the advanced independent bus line system on its main roads, the first example of the kind in China. Students made videos of a large amount of cyclists, cars and buses passing through the streets, and looked at how local people adapted to the

contemporary facilities. The newly built fast traffic lane is one of the main arteries of Kunming. However, the carriageway has divided the city into sections and brought noise and air pollution to the residential compounds on either side of the traffic. The outer ring road to the south has more than one level of fly-overs and an underpass for pedestrians. It is not the easiest place to find directions for, and has brought numerous environmental issues. Students were asked to analyse the pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle routes and look into transportation impact. The local tutors suggested looking under the high fly in the early morning and at night. The pedestrian space was adapted by different user groups. There were people who sought out newspapers in the early morning for delivery later and university students who advertised themselves to be tutors for school kids. Some spaces were used by pedestrians as a resting place. Students therefore found many more uses of a dual carriageway. Some commented that design in a developing country didn't mean one could not use modern technology and materials, but the focus would be on how the local people could make use of these facilities to solve their daily problems. A students' solution was to design the green space for different groups of users by using the ideas from a traditional Chinese garden (Fig.1 and 2).



Fig.1 West Station roundabout/underpass development in Kunming¹

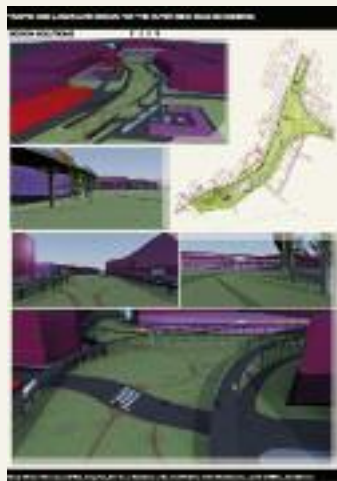


Fig.2 Dual carriageway project²

¹ Tutoring staff were Nang Ni, Biao Lui, Yun Gao, Liping Li, Hui Zhai, and David Brindley. Students were Helen Woodhead, Muhammad Iqbal, Jordan Cathcart, Luke Hurst, Hanyu Zhu, Qingyun Yu, Zhigang Liu.

² Tutoring staff were Lian Wang, Wen Lei, Yun Gao, Liping Li, Hui Zhai, and David Brindley. Students were Helen Washbourne, Unai Motrico-Gomez, Jamie Griffiths, Jake Barrow, Tao Yang, Yu Fan, Bo Li, Xiaozhou Li.

Four projects were also set up to investigate the tensions between traditional and modern and urban and rural life in the country. In China, according to Liauw, “400 new cities will be built over the next 20 years with newly urbanised populations of over 240 million” (Liauw 2008). In Kunming, new roads with high rise apartments and offices rapidly replace traditional urban fabric and courtyard houses. Contrast to what happened in Kunming, in small towns, such as the Old Town in Lijiang that students visited in the same trip, the indigenous tradition has been celebrated and reinvented for the tourism industry. The category of old and new or tradition and modernity are clearly marked and amplified. The boundary of the local identity has been pushed, and kept generating new meanings (Gao 2008) (Fig.3 and 4).

Fig.3 Kunming in 2009





*Fig.4 Lijiang in Yunnan
province 2008*

One project investigated the impacts of urban changes on traditional buildings. Wenmin Street was a Chinese traditional street full of courtyard houses. During the early 1980s, the flow of people and materials doubled with the economic development in Kunming, large amount of new residential quarters were built in a relatively short period to meet the urgent needs. Many locals who lived in old courtyard houses were willing to move into those new apartments. Because in most cases, the old houses in both the cities and towns were dilapidated, overcrowded and had a lack of basic hygiene and cooking facilities. Without enough funding for preservation or refurbishment to cater for the needs for the contemporary life, the householders saw their houses as obsolescent and backward and did not reflect their expected new ways of life. After the 1990s, however, not until large areas of traditional structures were removed and replaced by high rise buildings, did people start to revalue and appreciate the traditional courtyard houses. In this case, students learnt to study the relationship between architecture and people's daily life rather than simply labelling a building as traditional or modern. They commented that the only response to the stereotype of a Chinese curved roof could not give answers to the identity of a place (Fig.5).

Fig.5 Wenmin street project³



Rapid urban development has erased much traditional architecture and urban fabric. Due to the lack of effective policy of conservation and protection, traditional urban fabric is rapidly replaced with wide roads that lie on both sides with high rise apartments and modern shopping malls. Under the current commercial pressure, to find solutions to protect and renew the district is an urgent task.

Another project Wen Hua Lane was a very narrow lane close to the city centre park, Green Lake Park and three universities. With various small shops, cafes and restaurants supplying cuisine from different countries, it was popular with both Chinese students and foreign students studying in the adjacent universities. Like traditional Chinese streets, the shops had their goods laid outside to attract customers, which caused traffic and pedestrian jams. The task of the project was to analyse the existing problems in order to come up with a concept design to improve the existing planning methods. Students were presented with problems that confronted local residents and small businesses. Interviews with the local shop owners, students and local residency were conducted to reach decisions to smooth the traffic flow, emphasise the entrance of the road, and control the shop display on the pedestrian roads (Fig.6). In this project, Chinese students were also interested in the difference between Western and Chinese attitudes and understandings towards preservation and protection methods. The project was used as the case study to explore the cultural difference and to develop common ideas.

³ Tutoring staff were Lei Gao, Lizhou Tan, Yun Gao, Liping Li, Hui Zhai, and David Brindley. Students were Eugenia Ziaka, Smita Patel, Raheel Yousaf, Belmarío 'Kiwa' Santos, Wen Cheng, Xinyun Zhang, Haozhi Liu.



Fig.6 Wen Hua Lane Project⁴

The third group of the projects was to do with the comparison of the life in the UK and China. One was to compare the residential models. It required students to study the details of daily life of a residential compound in Kunming and discover the difference between residential design in these two countries. In the site survey, students were particularly impressed by the intensely used courtyard in the compound, where the residents exercise, dance and sing every morning and evening. They then worked with the administration group in the compound to work out a better layout for the public space (Fig.7).

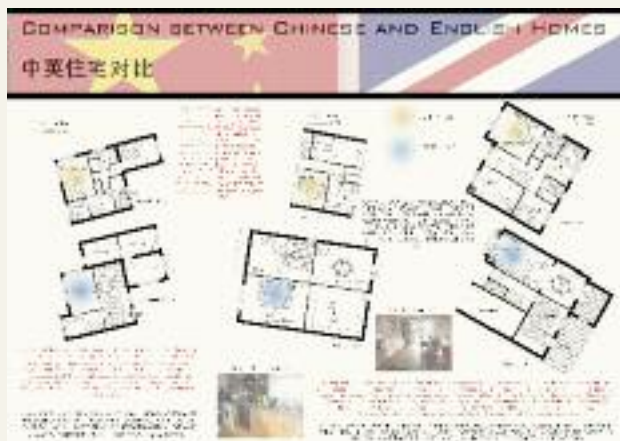


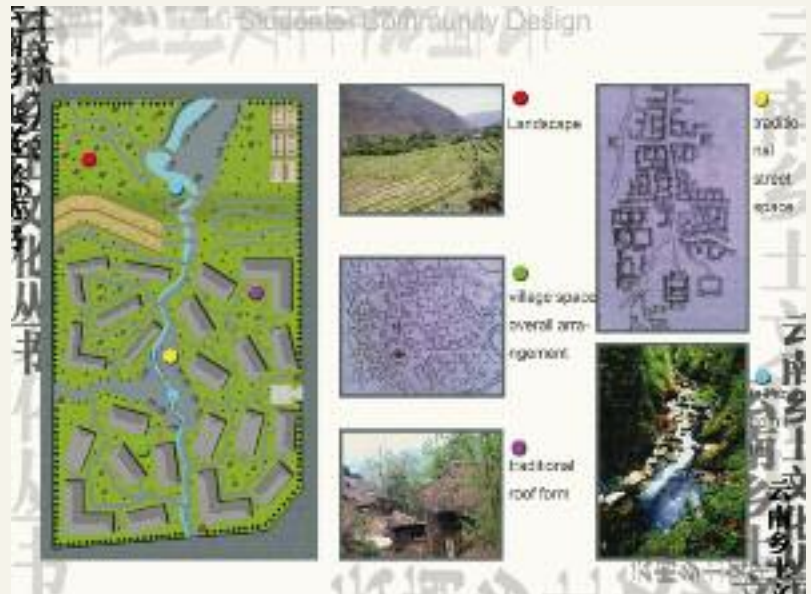
Fig.7 Residency comparison project⁵

⁴ Tutoring staff were Jie Ma, Qinyu Ma, Yun Gao, Liping Li, Hui Zhai, and David Brindley. Students were Sarah Vickers, Roger Ashman, Benjamin Wilkinson, Zhengfei Han, Chuanyun Jian, Beiye Chen.

⁵ Tutors were Can Wang, Wei Guo, Yun Gao, Liping Li, Hui Zhai, and David Brindley. Students were Siu Kai Pang, Thomas Rawnsley, Rachael Bayliss, Zhaojian Chen, Wen Jiang, Yanjun Meng.

Another project was about the increasing student numbers in the university campus that require additional accommodation. The changed lifestyle in Kunming meant that the historic pattern of six students sharing one big room was no longer an appropriate model. The group needed to work out a concept design for a low storey, but high density student accommodation. The project provided a good opportunity for students to develop schemes based on their own experience (Fig.8).

Fig.8 Student accommodation project⁶



On the campus, some facilities were also proposed to be transformed into 'Start-up' enterprise facilities and research incubators for the graduating students. The enterprises were to encourage a synergy between academic research and the commercial sector. Students were asked to consider the proposals to refurbish the old factory within the campus. The new facilities needed to encourage engagement from outside the campus. The design also needed to consider the buildings' history and environmental issues. The real problems in the life stimulated students' aspirations to find solutions, their design examined the issues underlying the appearance (Fig.9).

⁶ Tutoring staff were Zhaoning Liu, Yin Lu, Yun Gao, Liping Li, Hui Zhai, and David Brindley. Students were Elini Kantidakis, Faraz Ahmed, Kieran Conway, Roger Wedderkop, Xiong Xiong, Xi Yang, Tianzhi Li.



Fig.9 Campus regeneration project⁷

Assessment

In the assessment of the joint projects, students had to analyse and compare the differences of design in China and design in the United Kingdom. It is in the design process that they can aggregate resolution and bring together all the knowledge and skills they have learnt and solve the problems as a unified entity. In the conventional assessment criteria there are generally four aspects being assessed: concept development, technical resolution, design processes, and learning skills. These four aspects had been examined from a different perspective with the consideration to the local situations. In the joint projects, solutions to the real problems in China demonstrated students abilities to focus on understanding and making sense of the relational aspects with the different knowledge they learnt in design, history and in the communication process with Chinese students. As Wilson has argued that “‘imagination’ is to do with viewing the world from different perspectives. Acting imaginatively is to do with generating alternative solutions to a given problem or set of problems.” (Wilson 2002).

Biggs has advised that lecturers need to ensure that their learning objectives, course activities and assessment tasks are clearly aligned (Biggs, 1999). Due to the limited time for the field study in another country, we made

⁷ Tutoring staff were He Wang, Qin Yang, Yun Gao, Liping Li, Hui Zhai, and David Brindley. Students were Sarah Webster, Christina Forsyth, Khuram Mukhtar, Adrian Cope, Li Cao, Qiyang Li, He Zhang.

it clear that it was sufficient for British students to have a general understanding of the local situations. The detailed and profound knowledge of the local life would be helped by lectures and Chinese students working in the same group. The aim of the project is for students to use what they had learnt in China in their design for other projects, that is, to be able to use the knowledge they learnt about a place to influence their design processes. Rather than focus on the feel and look of a building, the emphasis should be solving the local problems with respect to local culture and environment.



Moral Encouragement and Support

In field trips, there is an element of culture shock; living in a different country and working closely with local students for a few weeks. Students can become quite emotional because they are exposed to an unfamiliar environment. The majority of students' fears for the trip are getting lost, and being unable to communicate with local people in English. It is important to give students moral encouragement and support before and during the trip. Much staff time is also needed on the arrangement of accommodation, food and daily travelling to and from the sites. There is also a need to closely monitor the work processes with all the groups on site. All of this can be helped greatly by staff and students of the local university in the visiting countries.



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“SEEKING HARMONY NOT SAMENESS” THROUGH INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION: FEELINGS OF HUDDERSFIELD-KUST JOINT DESIGN STUDIO

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Kunming University of Science and Technology (KUST) is located in Kunming, the capital of China's Yunnan province which borders on Myanmar (Burma), Vietnam and Laos. Kunming is known as China's "spring" city, because of its year-round spring-like temperatures. There are 26 ethnic groups that live on the red earth plateau of "four seasons co-exist in a mountain and customs differ in five kilometers", among the 25 minorities, 15 are unique in Yunnan. The different ethnic groups and their colourful customs created the variety and richness of Yunnan's culture, including traditional architecture culture. Yunnan has several ancient towns, some of them have remained unchanged for centuries, allowing visitors to get a glimpse into ancient China and see local people living as they have for centuries. Yunnan has, so to speak, one of the most ethnic culture that the world features. Moreover, it attaches great importance to the protection and development of the cultural variety and achieved remarkable results.

Based on the fact above, the teaching in the architecture department of KUST strongly emphasizes its outstanding research features on Yunnan vernacular architecture, strengthening regionality through studies on protection of traditional residence and culture-led regeneration. Meanwhile, the onward march of globalisation is not ineluctable, therefore we must open to the outside world and strike a balance between global and local. The "glocal of teaching" is one of hard efforts in architecture teaching of KUST.

In Chinese traditional culture, "和合之境" Harmonious and Syncretic Situation is the supreme realm of life and art, as well as architecture and architectural education. And in Chinese character, "合" means unite (联合), combine (结合), conform to (符合) and cooperate (合作) or work together (合力); and "和" means harmonious (和谐), mild (和善), and joint (联结). A Chinese saying and proverb which from the analects of Confucius: "Seeking Harmony Not Sameness" (和而不同). That's to say, harmony but not sameness; reserving differences without coming into conflict. Harmony promotes co-existence and co-prosperity; whereas differences foster mutual complementation and mutual support. Harmony without sameness is one of the important principles in the international co-operation.

Similarly, Alfred North Whitehead, an English philosopher, believes that every actual entity is sensitive to the existence of others and has its intrinsic value, and all sensitive actual entities are different but interdependent.

The bountiful different relations are in coordination and coexistence. In his view, harmony would be open to novelty, so it is a dynamic actual entity with adventure in an endless process, which includes rich creativity and many new possibilities, deriving from the difference and the diversity in harmony. To be sure, harmony is a dynamic actual entity with the rich sources of creation (Browning, D and Myers, T 1998).

As the information age and global era approaches, more and more international communication between universities of China and overseas have emerged. The communication has provided an opportunity for the expansion and improvement in speciality education. The Architectural Department of Kunming University of Science and Technology (KUST) has conducted some international cooperative teaching courses in recent years, but the tangible international joint design studio began with the Department of Architecture at the University of Huddersfield (UoH) in 2007, and it has become an innovative teaching approach apart from regular courses. Therefore, I should say thanks to all the staff who took part in the joint projects between these two universities, especially to Dr Gao Yun in UoH and Associate Professor Gao Jing in KUST, who established the link between these two departments and made the joint projects happen.

The joint design studio between Architecture Department of KUST and Department of Architecture at the University of Huddersfield was an attempt based on new ideals and methods, and revealed our professional teaching standards and promoted the intercollegiate cooperation and open design teaching mode. Through the cooperation, a solid platform for the students of KUST to step into the world was built, and the differences of architectural education in two countries may be changed into the design value diversification for both of us. We learn from each other, know more about the two countries, not only architecture, but also culture, folk custom, cityscape, academic teaching and so on. The communication develops the abilities of professional cooperation and design practice of Chinese students in face-to-face situations with foreign students.

Nevertheless, to the Huddersfield-KUST joint design studio in the future, the advanced research is needed, especially on aspects of organisation, time-arrangement, adjustment to curriculum, subject selection and cultural diversity.

From “合” (cooperate; work together) to “和” (harmonious), from “求同存异” (Seeking sameness but keeping difference) to “和而不同” (Seeking Harmony not Sameness), a cross-cultural, interdisciplinary, cross-grade interactive teaching is now emerging, but both of us have a long way to go together. One Chinese famous remark by Qu Yuan said, “The way ahead is long; I see no ending, yet high and low I’ll search with my will unbending” (路漫漫其修远兮，吾将上下而求索). Let us encourage each other in our endeavours.

As the information age and global era approaches, more and more international communication between universities of China and overseas have emerged.

At last, I would like to wish the Huddersfield-KUST joint design studio and the International Architecture course at the University of Huddersfield have a sustained success.



Reference

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THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND PRACTICE IN ARCHITECTURE IN KUNMING, CHINA

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Abstract:

A feature of the discipline of architecture and construction at the Kunming University of Science and Technology is the development of the theoretical and practical aspects of the subject, in combination with an exploration of the regional cultural characteristics of south west China. However we have seen in the rapid development of globalization, old teaching methods, training objectives, standards, planning, and so on are in a state of change. This is reflected in changes in the programme, coordinating the relationship between regional and international architecture education. The aim is to cultivate architecture professionals with a user centred outlook and both regional and international understanding and abilities. In order to describe the balance between regional and international issues, this paper discusses our educational ideas, programme content, teaching methods, organisational features and practices.

Kunming University of Science and Technology is located in Yunnan province in the south west of China. It is the major base for professional architectural training in the region. Yunnan province has a distinctive history of human settlement across diverse geographic locations with varied biodiversity and ethnic cultures. These regional features create extremely interesting and favourable conditions for the discipline of architecture (Fig.1).

*Fig.1 Vernacular building in
Yunnan*



The Department of Architecture at Kunming University of Science and Technology is committed to exploring the discipline of architecture through careful consideration of the ethnic characteristics of the region. We emphasise the importance of the location in theoretical study and explore the local vernacular architecture in design and construction methods. We have, over the years, accumulated a wealth of experience in theories and design practices relating to local architecture, technologies and urban planning in medium and small towns.

We have now established four distinctive academic research areas, namely:

- 1) local and regional building
- 2) traditional settlement and heritage protection
- 3) planning of historical and cultural towns and tourist areas
- 4) appropriate construction technology and ecological architecture

These research areas are important in giving academic direction for the development of our architectural undergraduate teaching. They also underpin a strong teaching team who have had a large number of theoretical and practical achievements relating to local characteristics and resources in Yunnan (Fig.2).



Fig.2 Real projects by staff

Recently, under the impact of globalisation we recognise the increasing significance of environmental sustainability and regional cultural identities. The new challenges posed by external influences have prompted a rethink of architecture curricula and a re-examination of teaching and learning. The primary aim is to develop architecture professionals with an understanding of both regional and international issues and an ability to design in different cultures. In order to meet the challenges and development requirements, we have developed our teaching programmes accordingly.



1. Principles – Emphasis on both regional and global vision

The basic aim of our architecture undergraduate course is to produce architectural practitioners. The architecture curriculum is focused on regional cultural characteristics and trends. The idea is to produce professionals who are able to adapt to the economic and social changes through rapid urbanisation of China with an understanding of regional and international developments in the technologies, humanities and environmental sustainability. We focus on small towns and rural architecture, ecological problems in living environments, protection of historical towns and villages and the care of traditional buildings.



2. Teaching and learning methods

2.1 The relationship between design and territory

We explore with students the regional design methods in order to establish specific, natural and cultural backgrounds, which give an objective basis for design in particular places. The attention is focused on place, natural resources and social economic and cultural issues. Its main content includes three levels:

Place and regional architecture

Projects are undertaken to examine “regional characteristics of architecture design” into which we integrate the consideration of site condition, spatial needs, construction and structure. For example, the third year projects include “The design of buildings in mountainous regions” and “Vernacular architecture design” and various other design projects related to place.

Ecological and regional architecture

Alongside the study of regional aspects our course content includes concepts of ecological or green architecture in order for students to explore passive design in relation to local geography and climate etc.

Civilian life and regional architecture

Under this theme students are concerned with the social aspects of design. Projects include “ordinary architecture”, “civic architecture” and “edge architecture”. In second year for example, students look at “primary school design” and “residential research and creative design”, which are intended to allow them to investigate and cultivate a sense of social responsibility (Fig.3).



Fig.3 students' design with regional features

*Students' design
abilities have improved
significantly through
uniting design, practice
and research*

2.2 Practical experience and theory

It is impossible to obtain all the architectural professional skills from the classroom. Traditional architecture education has often overvalued the effects of classroom teaching for students. Therefore we have reconsidered delivery modes to foster practical abilities by bringing together basic theory courses and practice courses, with an emphasis on actual abilities and engineering training. All students have to finish a production design course in order to qualify. Curriculum design, graduate design and extracurricular activities are our most important 3 aspects to inspire students' thinking and develop students' innovation.

In the first year students undertake "building practical". They have to finish a whole "project", including determining themes, choosing materials and designing the structure. These tasks help to cultivate ingenuity, creativity and environmental awareness and allow students to appreciate the practical craft of building.

In second year students study architecture design and related theory, materials and structure through model making.

Senior students are encouraged to research scientific and engineering practice in combination with design projects. When design thesis combines with research projects quality can be greatly improved. Through high-level research driven teaching, we have formed distinctive "teacher-postgraduate-undergraduate" units. This is a kind of master-apprentice model for teaching and learning in modern architecture education (Fig.4).

We have constructed this "design-practice-research" teaching mode by grouping courses. Students' design abilities have improved significantly through uniting design, practice and research. In class, we introduced this investigation to deepen understanding and enhance design abilities. For example, "residence research and creativity" in the third year and "design research monograph" in the fifth year are fresh and innovative.

2.3 Co-operation and external communication

China is increasingly engaged with the international community. It is becoming very important to consider how to adapt to these developments. In the Department of Architecture in Kunming University of Science and Technology we are actively seeking to reach out and work with others and open our doors to welcome external partners. We study international and domestic counterparts in order to raise our standards and to emulate characteristics of best practice.



Fig.4 senior students' designs under teachers' projects

We have many favourable conditions for foreign exchanges, such as the unique geographical features and rich cultural resources of Yunnan, which is the gateway to south-east Asian countries.

We have formed four kinds of cooperation in order to broaden our academic horizons, namely:

- 1) with foreign similar universities
- 2) with Chinese similar universities
- 3) interdisciplinary and
- 4) with local design firms

In China, we have established good relationships with Tsinghua University, Beijing University and Chongqing University amongst others. In addition, architects and planners with rich practical experience and theory have been invited to teach and we have stable outside training bases, which are mainly design institutes and corporations, providing special scholarships for students who excel. From curriculum design, design competitions, internship in design institutes and thesis to employment, we all focus on the interaction between school and employment units. This is a win-win situation and an effective and practical teaching mechanism.

Elsewhere in the world, joint teaching and research, student exchanges and other forms of interaction are accelerating the process of internationalisation. We are committed to study architectural theories and teaching methods of others and to explore similar issues through international cooperation. We have recently cooperated with some well known universities,

including Michigan University of Architecture and Urban Planning, Washington State University, University of Huddersfield and FH Aachen University.

We have engaged advisors from outside China to help direct design and thesis projects of undergraduates, and have carried out research on urban history with specialists from EU and ASEAN.

With the University of Huddersfield, UK we have a long term established relationship. Students from both schools have worked together to investigate problems about urban planning and architectural design, when students from Huddersfield visited Kunming in academic years 2007/2008 and 2009/2010. Around 150 Chinese students, including undergraduates, postgraduates, and a number of teaching staff have been involved in joint projects during this time, and one teacher from KUST is currently studying for her doctorate degree at University of Huddersfield (Fig.5)

*Fig.5 communication
with the University of
Huddersfield, UK*



We expect such relationships, both internationally and within China to increase over time, which will enrich our teaching programmes and methods of delivery. The intention is to expand the frontiers of the discipline, particularly in relation to architectural developments such as ecological technology, digital technology and protection of architectural heritage.

Indeed, we have already benefitted from some curriculum developments and external cooperation by helping to address urgent problems in reality. In Kunming for instance, we have done several theme designs such as “investigation of protecting and renewing old Kunming city”, “survey of college students dormitories”, “reconstruction of old factory buildings” and “environmental design along the expressway in Kunming”.

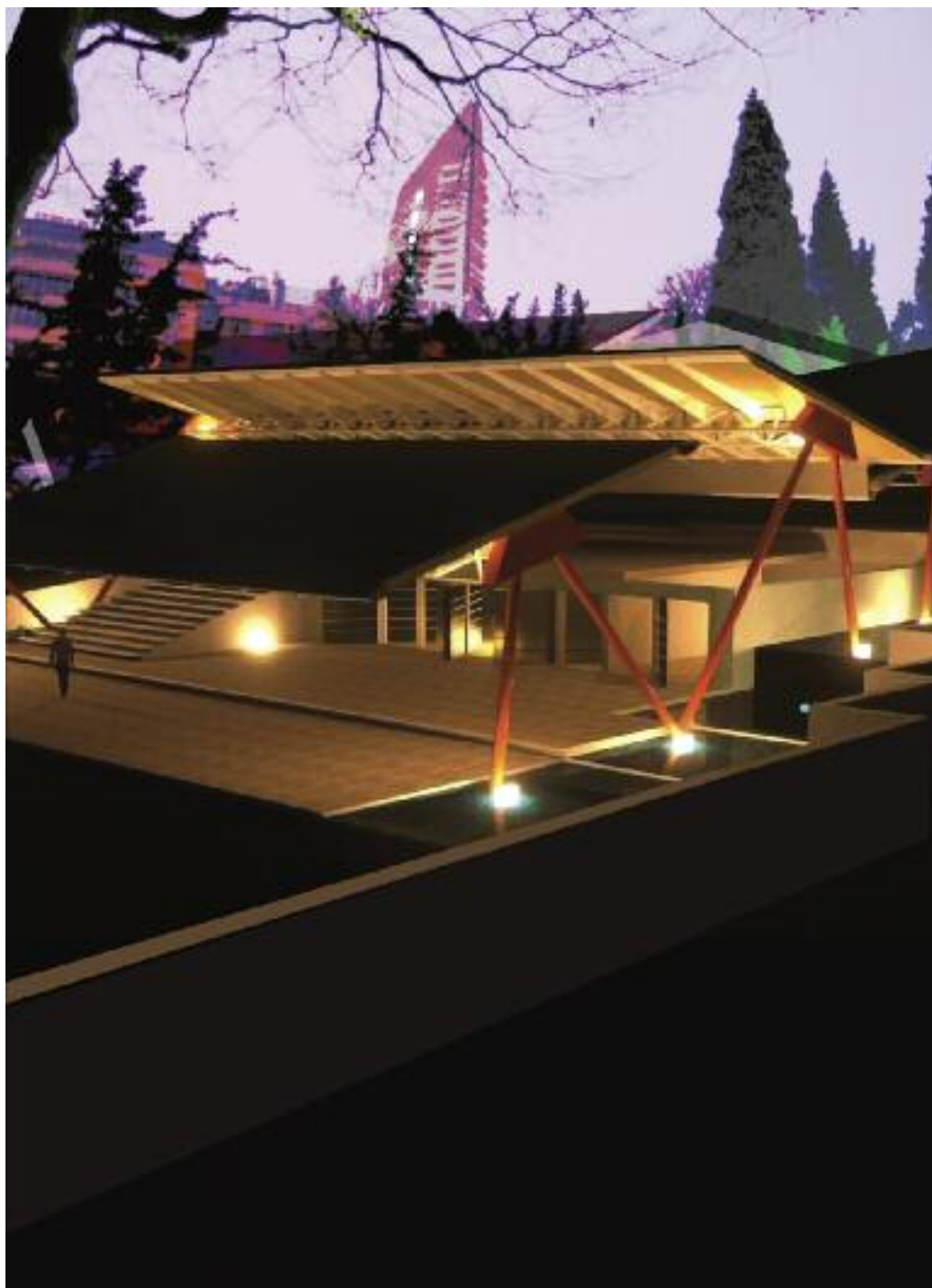
External cooperation and joint teaching projects have been one of the most important aspects of our curriculum in recent years. Students and teachers from different cultures, living environments and academic backgrounds have worked together and have contributed to progressive development of teaching and design to the benefit of all participants. United schooling like this is welcomed by all students and teachers from different countries, because it provides a platform for international exchange and achieves good results.

3 Direction

After long-term efforts, the Department of Architecture in Kunming University of Science and Technology has passed the National Architecture Undergraduate Teaching Assessment consecutively three times and gained “the higher school of architecture specialist teaching quality evaluation qualification certificate”. In 2008 our characteristic construction model was validated among the higher schools in China.

Yunnan is an excellent region for the study of architecture and an good place from which to confront the international and global challenges. We develop architecture students with a deep and critical understanding of regional characteristics and their relationship with globalisation.

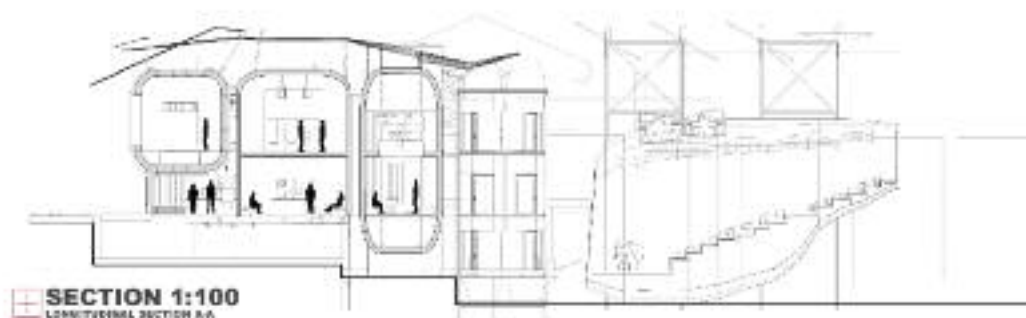
We believe that “regionalisation” and “internationalisation” are important aspects of teaching reform. We still have a lot of things to do and there is still a long way to go, but we are full of confidence!

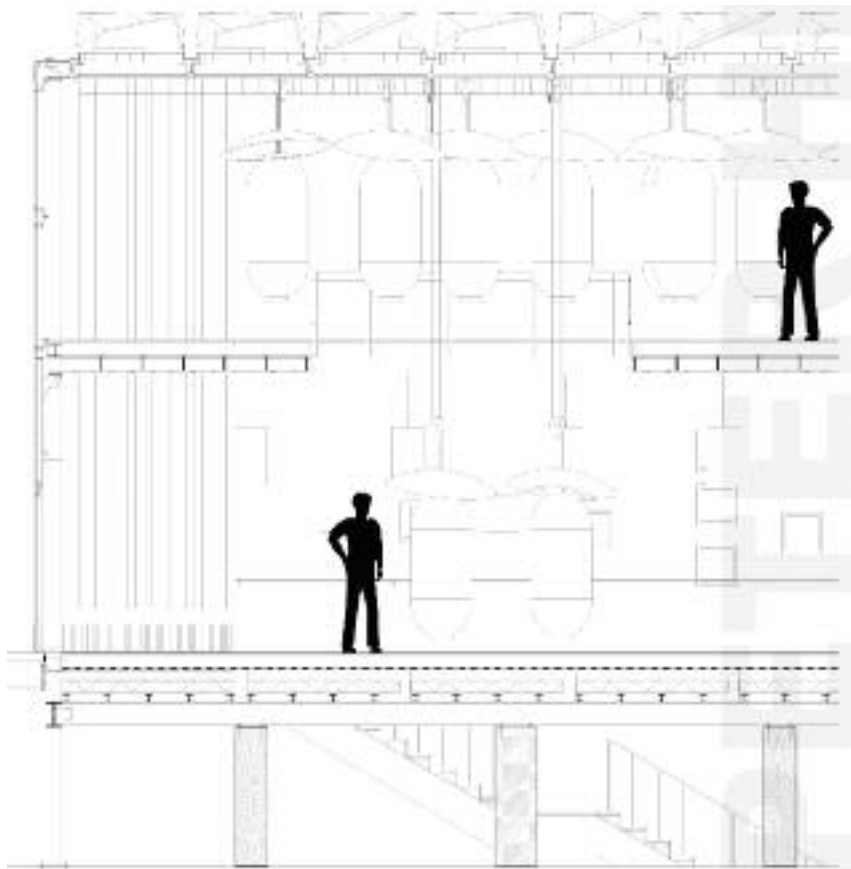


The concept is based on movement and body posture. The dynamic structure evokes dancers dancing and gives the building life and movement. Conversely the spaces are quite static and derive from an exploration of the systematic organisation of spaces in traditional Chinese courtyard houses.

The structure of the building allows the building to be naturally ventilated whilst maintaining privacy from the overlooking surrounding buildings. The characteristics of the Confucius curve are manifest throughout the protective roof canopy.

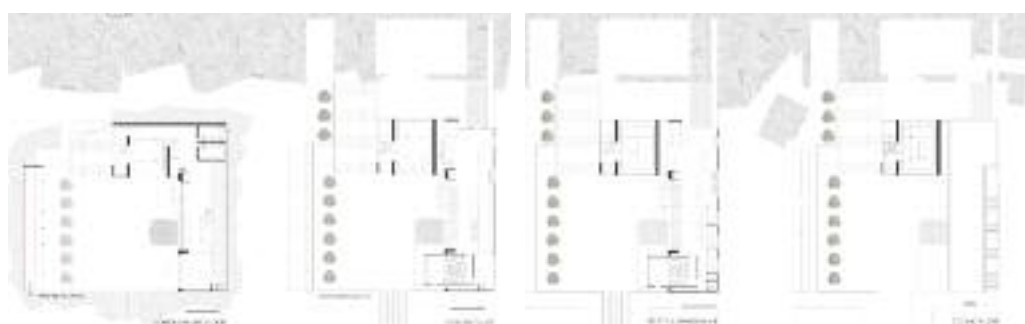






The site for this building sits on an axis of the more than two thousand year old city of Kunming in China, between an overcrowded pedestrian area and an underused large scale sunken square that was surrounded by some derelict 2-3 story buildings. The design solution not only investigates the ways that newly created spaces intervene with the existing space at various levels, but also creates new open public areas that support the access to existing small businesses at different levels, as an alternative to the adjacent large shopping malls. The design process explores the programme of information dissemination through a series of dynamic and sculptural components which are integral in defining the spatial choreography of the cultural centre.







The concept explores movement, identity and transparency. Originally the site blocked the ancient axis that runs from north to south through Kunming. A semi-transparent building celebrates this ancient route, and provides a well structured end to the axis within the sunken courtyard. A vast staircase leads into the sunken courtyard and represents a journey from an ancient time to the rapid modern commercialisation. The staircase finishes in a protected place that will hold the history of Yunnan. The main feature of the building is the suspended gallery. This area of the design combines all three concepts, creating a lightweight single space that is protecting Yunnan's culture in a metaphorical state of suspension.



This project addresses the purpose of a heritage centre as a place that preserves the culture of Kunming, where architecture can act as a counterpoint to the potential loss of a truly diverse and inspiring cultural province.

Punctuating a strong promenade and also the skyline of Kunming, the upper fractured gallery creates a strong metaphorical sculpture that alludes allegorically to this possible loss of cultural identity by creating a new positive educational space, under which sits an exciting and dramatic public space that meanders through a forest of steel struts.





The new Kunming Heritage and Culture Centre is a light weight steel framed building built onto the existing RC substructure that supports Jimbi Square and the existing buildings. A new bridge is designed over water to re-instate the original North South axis. A large tree, visible from the Square, invites visitors to cross the bridge and enter the Heritage Centre and the fountain square beyond. The newly created route takes a visitor through the new water garden and directly down into the fountain square, which is landscaped and now has plenty of seating, from which to view the various activities which will take place in the square.

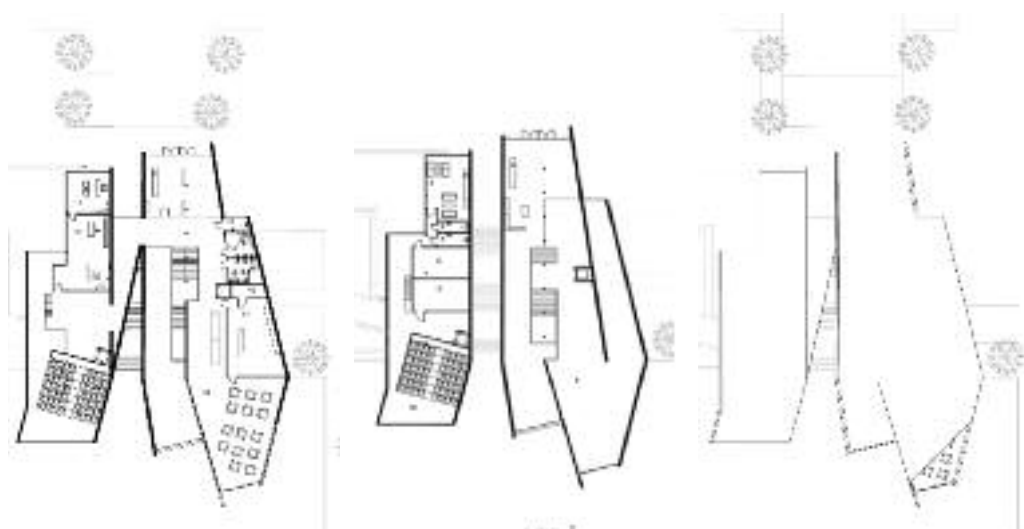


DANIEL MORGAN



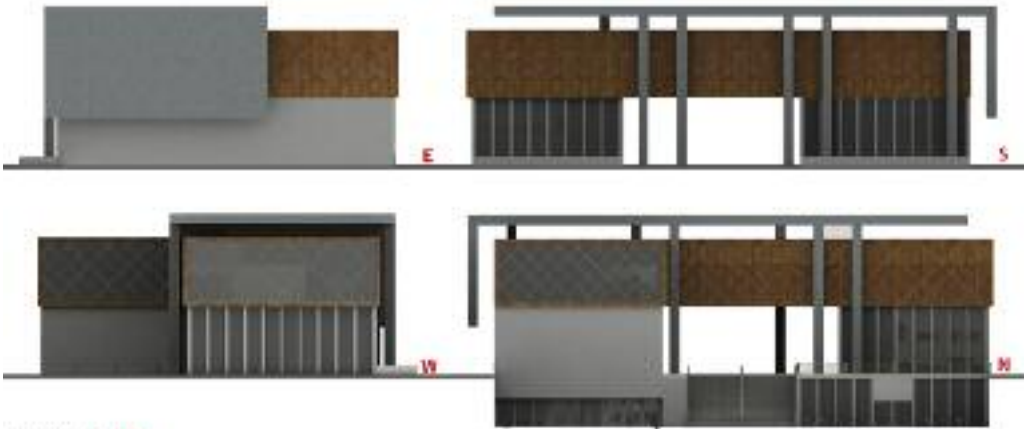
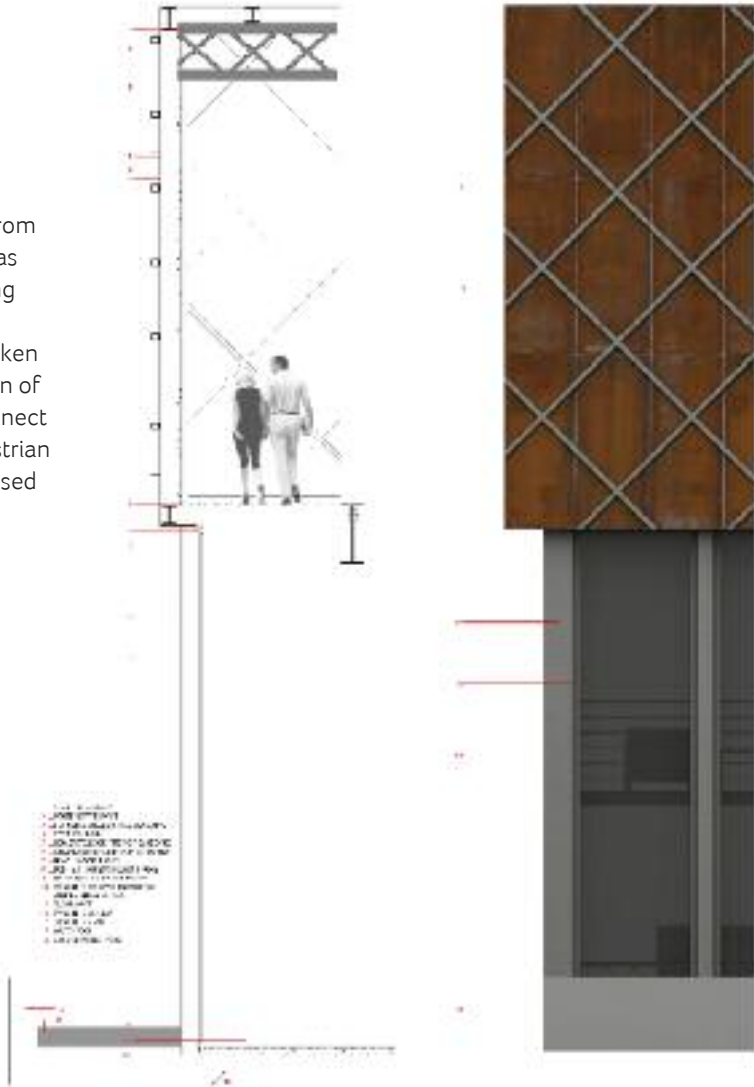
The site is at the end of a busy precinct that works its way from north to south. The main concept of the design is to create a linear form that expresses this main axis of pedestrian movement. The different angles of walkways follow the lines by which people would move onto the site and occupy the space. Two blocks of the building and the linking gateway between them represent the bridge to link the increasingly globalised urban fabrics in Kunming and its traditional roots.



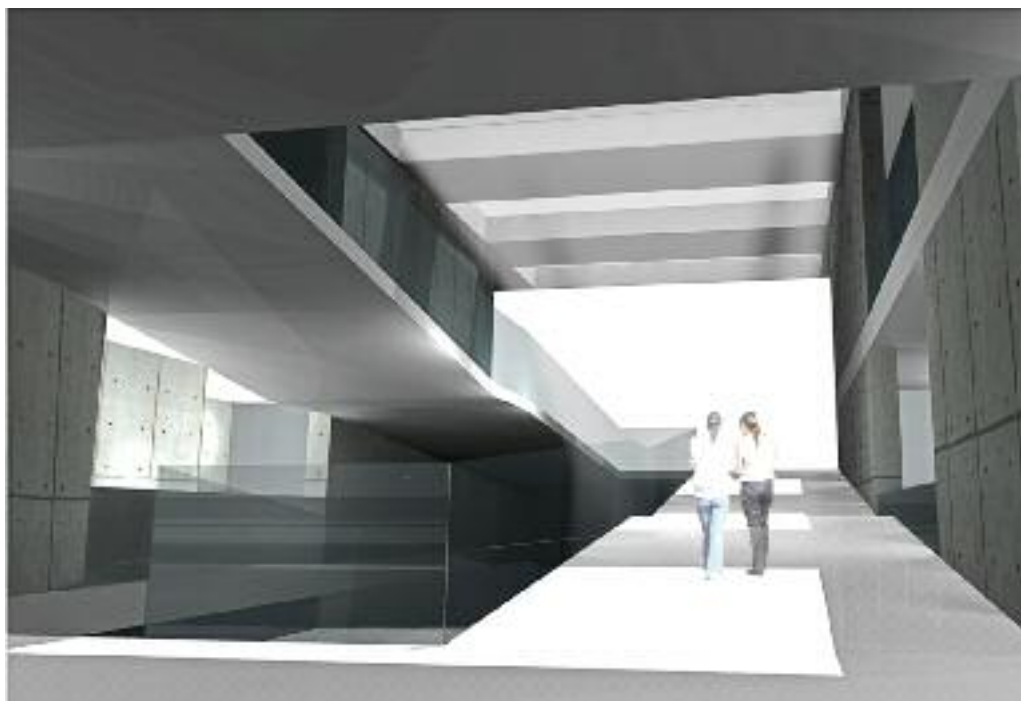




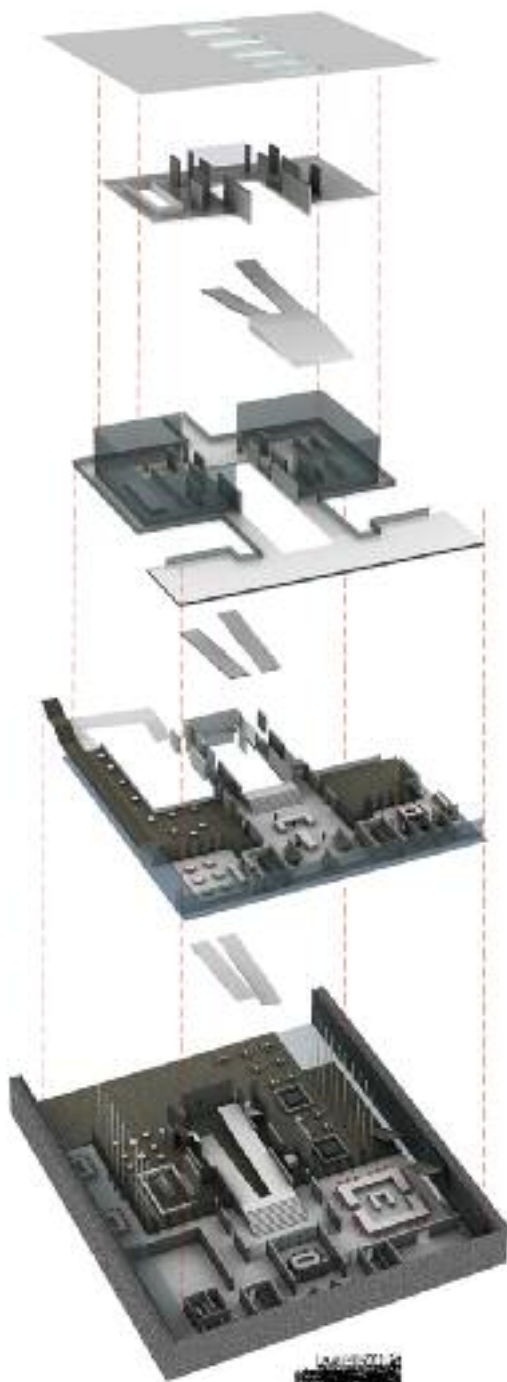
The site sits on the city's traditional axis that runs from north to south. The axis was stopped by a line of existing two-storey buildings that enclose an underused sunken space. The gate-like design of the building aims to reconnect the axis from a busy pedestrian route to the existing enclosed sunken space.



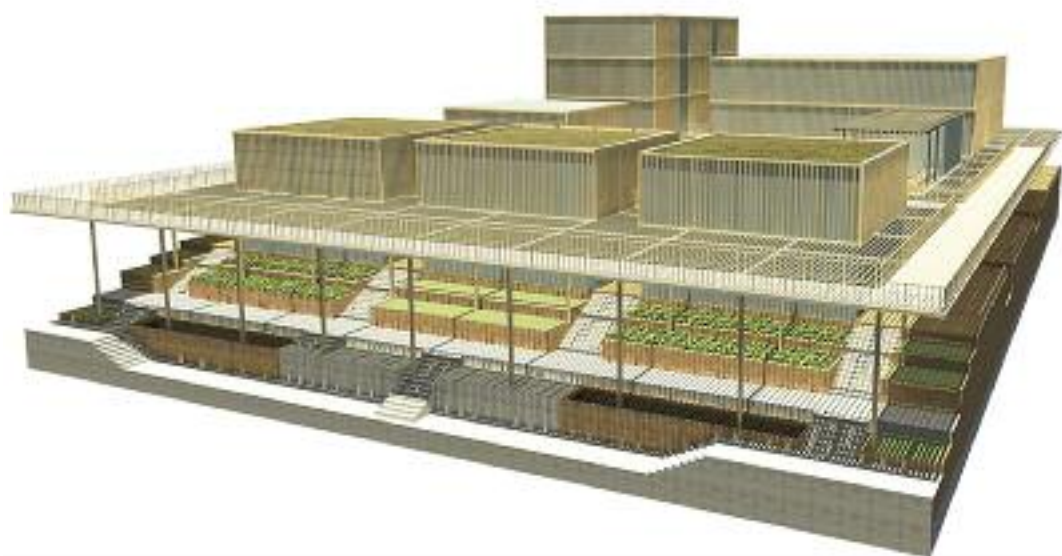
JAMIE GRIFFITHS



The design has considered three materials that bear Chinese cultural meanings. Firstly, water is used throughout the Chinese culture that symbolises purity. That is the reason the water is designed to surround the building. The building also used Litracon which is a kind of light transmitting concrete. This is used at the central circulation core, transmitting shadows of the passers by through to the other side of the wall. This represents the concept of motion evoking a sense that the building is living. Chinese slate is mined within close proximity to the city of Kunming. It is used to slow down and oxygenate the water as it trickles downwards, giving not only a natural aesthetic but also enhances the acoustics of the nearby spaces which brings the tranquil feeling.



JULIAN MCINTOSH

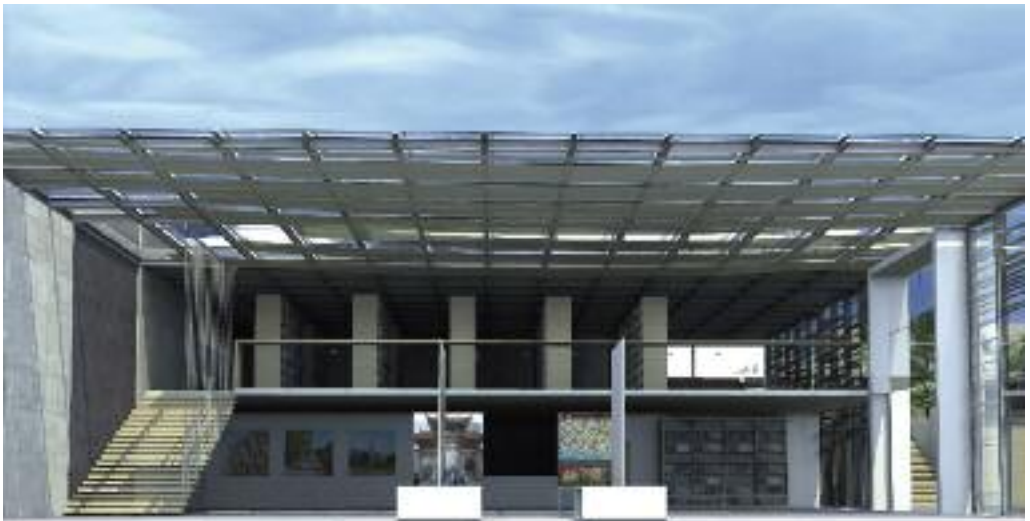




The form of the Confucius school of thought is designed as a complete object and reflects the different urban blocks around the site. Below to the left are the hanging gardens and to the bottom left is the library. The tea gardens are designed to create a link between the upper and lower site. Rising through the tea garden creates a dramatic effect upon entering the Confucius school. The gardens are naturally shaded by the timber roof creating dramatic shadows.



In Kunming, the dilution of China's cultural identity due to globalisation is becoming more apparent, as is the opposing insistence that individuals hold on to their cultural integrity and pride. The strategy for design in this context is based upon the metaphor of the old and new existing side by side. A recurring theme of the site is the combination of transparency and permeability. Reduced palettes of both colour and material emphasise the variety of inside and outside spaces. Newly introduced axes in the scheme have added a new width to the existing temple complex. The dominant design of the façade comes from a physical representation of DNA, alluding to the theme of identity.



NICOLAS PROCTER

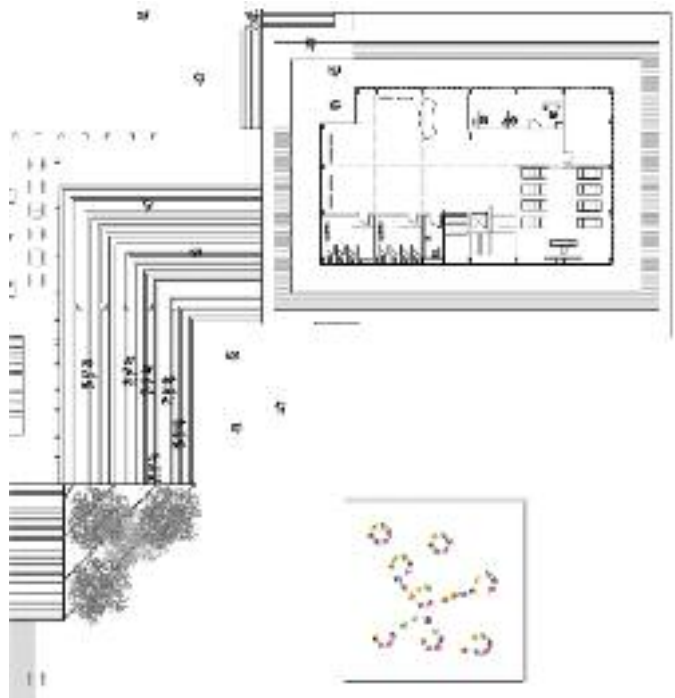
There are 26 ethnic groups with enormously diverse cultures in Yunnan province. The concept for the building developed through an explanation of cohesion and fragmentation to represent this diversity. The mountain is a place where people can experience calm feelings in traditional Chinese culture, the building is like a mountain which conjures up a calm and creative atmosphere. The roof forms of temples in China are also an inspiration. Using strong free geometric shapes the aim is to create spaces that articulate both a mountain and a temple.





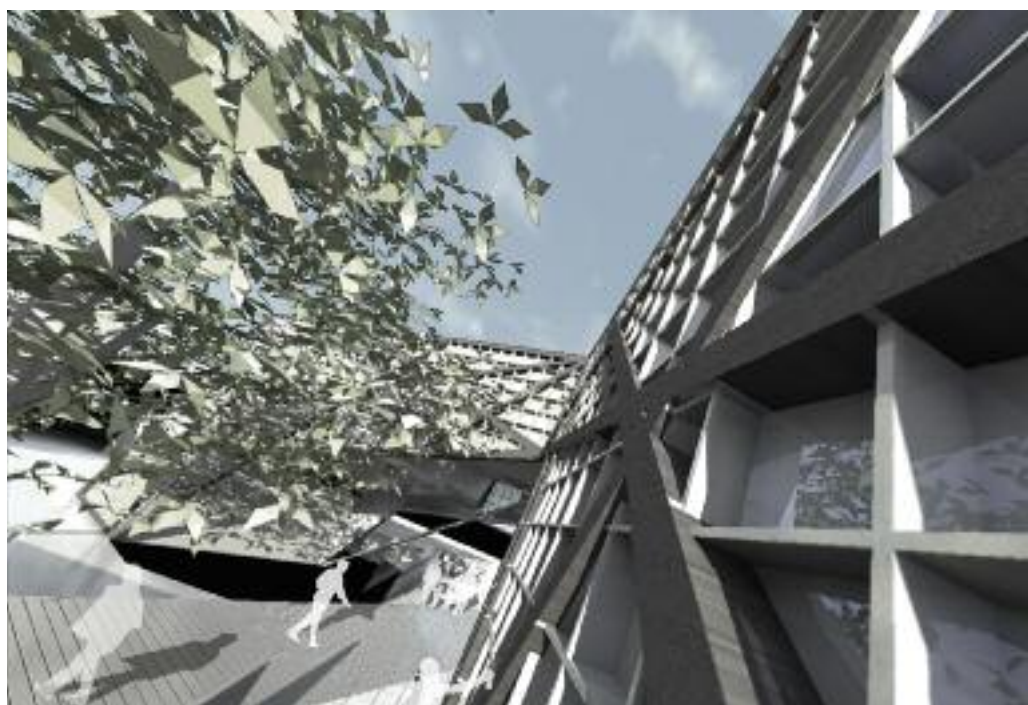


Over the last few years Kunming has somewhat lost its identity to rapid development, replacing the traditional buildings with high rise tower blocks and shopping centres. Now a modern 21st century city, Kunming needs to embrace the remaining heritage and significant cultural aspects. This Culture and Heritage centre aims to do this through celebrating the 26 different cultures within the Yunnan province providing them with a stage to show off the diversity of this great place.



Affectionately known as the spring city due to its climate, Kunming provides the perfect environment for national growth. Kunming is continuously developing and becoming increasingly 'globalised'. This fast pace development has now overshadowed the history and tradition in the area. Little now remains of the old Kunming and the old buildings cannot be brought back. So the people of Kunming look towards the contemporary identity. The aim behind this design for a Heritage Centre was to highlight the strength and unity within the 26 ethnic cultures in Yunnan province. When combined as one, they create one great city and one iconic building.







The Confucius Temple lies in the heart of Kunming city, adjacent to the fast developed area that is full of modern buildings. The strongest influence in the design lies in the surrounding environment of the site. It is the blend of the old and new that has inspired the shape and design of the new Confucian School. The journey for making the paper from the traditional bamboo scrolls to the contemporary use of pieces of paper acts as the concept for the design. Inspiration for the accommodation area comes from observation of the market space on the other side of walls, in which various blocks form an extremely lively environment.







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